

Curse of Kyle is cruel on Hatters

THE CURSE of Kyle Lightbourne returned to haunt Luton Town at Stoke City on Saturday.

Lightbourne scored twice for Walsall to dash the Hatters automatic promotion hopes three seasons ago and his 87th-minute winner at the Britannia Stadium makes the prospect of a play-off challenge this time around pretty remote.

The 31-year-old striker climbed off the bench last season to complete a 3-1 home victory for Stoke.

And on Saturday Lightbourne's late goal cruelly denied 10-man Luton a point after he had come on as a sub midway through the second-half. Afterwards, a stunned Lennie Lawrence said: "Kyle Lightbourne always gets a goal against us and it's usually a key one."

"Some players with good reputations do absolutely nothing against you but he's always the one to stick the knife in."

Lightbourne's goal might have been the fatal blow for Luton but, for 86 minutes, it was referee Chris Foy who had the biggest bearing on the game.

The home side forged ahead on 25 minutes with a controversial goal from James O'Connor appeared to shove

match facts

STOKE CITY 2 LUTON TOWN 1

● **STOKE:** Gavin Ward, Nicky Mohan, Graham Kavanagh, Peter Thorne (Kyle Lightbourne, 70), Mikael Hansson, Paul Connor, James O'Connor, Ben Petty (Brynjar Gunnarsson, 80), Clive Clarke (Einar Danielsson, 70), Anders Jacobsen, Frode Klippe.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Emmerson Boyce, Matthew Taylor, Gary Doherty, Julian Watts, Marvin Johnson, Matthew

Spring, Adam Locke, Alan White (Liam George, 88), Stuart Douglas (Andrew Fotiadis, 71) Phil Gray. Subs not used: Andre Scarlett, Stuart Fraser, Daniel Tate.

● **Shots on target:** Stoke 5, Luton 2.

● **Off target:** Stoke 5, Luton 7.

● **Corners:** Stoke 5, Luton 3.

● **Referee:** Chris Foy (St Helens).

● **Top Hatter:** Watts – defensive linchpin.

Hatters captain Marvin Johnson over before gathering Peter Thorne's flick on and shooting past Nathan Abbey.

Johnson and the away fans behind the goal waited for the effort to be ruled out but, to their collective amazement, Mr Foy raced back to the centre circle.

The St Helens referee then baffled the whole Britannia Stadium on the stroke of half time by sending off Hatters wing-back Matthew Taylor.

Mr Foy reached for his red card after Taylor's momentum during a typically robust raid down the left flank saw him run into a grounded Mikael Hansson.

Taylor was immediately ordered off despite the lack of a protest from the home players, bench or supporters.

The Merseyside official later said Taylor had deliberately kicked Hansson but the indiscretion was so minor surely a yellow card would have sufficed.

It was clearly Taylor's first ever early bath with the dismayed teenager not knowing what to do or where to go as he trudged first towards the bench and then headed for the dressing room.

His team-mates were not far behind as Luton went in at the break 1-0 down with 10 men when it could have been 0-0 and

11 against 11. Johnson filled in at left-back as Lawrence switched to a flat back four in the second-half and his players responded with a spirited display.

Julian Watts was commanding and the improving Emmerson Boyce battled well as an orthodox right-back but the Hatters struggled to test home keeper Gavin Ward until Mr Foy intervened again to complete a hat-trick of mystifying decisions.

This time Mohan was adjudged to have pushed Phil Gray and Luton were awarded a dubious penalty.

Matthew Spring coolly side-footed the spot-kick into Ward's bottom right-hand corner to pull the 10 men level.

Stoke boss Gudjon Thordarson sent on Lightbourne 10 minutes later and the super-sub delivered the winning goal.

Apart from a long-range Graham Kavanagh free-kick, Abbey had few saves to make but once more illustrated his set-piece inadequacies in dealing with Lightbourne's goal.

Abbey allowed Lightbourne's hopeful flicked header from Kavanagh's long throw to slip through his fingers and could only look on helplessly as the ball drifted into his net off the far post.



Lennie's verdict

We didn't have ourselves to blame for many things but we were to blame for the goal. In a moment's lack of concentration we lost everything. We had everybody except Fotiadis in the penalty area but it ended up in our net.